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ABSTRACT

This handbook addresses questions childminders might have as they begin and continue in the job. Discussion focuses on (1) registration; (2) aspects of childminding such as planning, housework, equipment, toys, safety, and health; (3) play, (especially as related to imaginative play, painting, writing and drawing, water, dough, outdoor play, and talking), children with special needs, and children from other cultures; (4) opportunities for continuing education; (5) food service; (6) safety; (7) money and business, including fees, insurance, taxes, and social security; (8) parents; and (9) ways of locating families needing childminding services. Also included are a description of the National Childminding Association and childminders' accounts of the nature and conditions of their work. (RH)

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# HOW TO SURVIVE .... .... AS A CHILDMINDER

## a handbook from National Childminding Association

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# HOW TO SURVIVE AS A CHILDMINDER . . .

**A handbook from the National Childminding Association**

**By**

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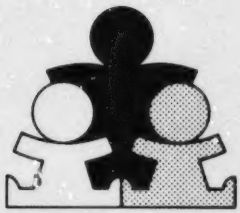

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the N.C.M.A. Childminders' Handbook! We have tried to include all the questions which might arise for you as you start childminding and as you continue in the job. We readily admit that we don't have all the answers (sometimes we have simply raised an issue for you to think about) and usually this is because an answer doesn't yet exist. Although childminding is one of the oldest professions, and we know of cases as far back as Roman times, we are still in the pioneering stages in terms of organisation and support. Also, many of the answers to these questions will vary according to where you live; for instance, there is no standard rate of pay across the country, nor is there any standard procedure for registration and support by Social Services Departments. It will be up to you to find out what the situation is in your area and then, with the help of other minders and with the support of the N.C.M.A. and your Social Services Department, you can work to improve it.

This handbook starts with registration and moves on through sections on money and business, play, safety and first aid, diet and many more. As well as simply giving information we hope that you also get a 'feel' for what it is like to be a minder – hence our frequent quotes from minders and the section on typical days. Remember, N.C.M.A. publishes many other booklets on the topics covered here and, where appropriate, we refer to the fuller discussion which they offer.

So, even though we don't have all the answers, we have tried to ensure that this handbook covers all those issues which a childminder should think about before embarking on one of the World's most important jobs: caring for other people's children.

## WHAT IS A CHILDMINDER?

The word childminder means different things to different people. By law a registered childminder is anyone caring for a child to whom she is not closely related, for two or more hours a day, and who receives a 'reward' for this service – a very formal description of the hard earned salaries most childminders receive. Within the framework of the law, then, that is what a childminder is. But, surely, a childminder is infinitely more than that? To a parent a childminder usually means peace of mind to enable them to go to work or study, with arrangements and hours to suit, and at a reasonable price. To the child, the childminder means a caring person with time for play, food and fun: a complement to the care he or she gets at home. To the Social Services Department the childminder is a valuable, flexible and unique service and some local authorities are now recognising this and providing better support and advice for their minders.

So there are all sorts of minders meeting the needs of all sorts of families, being friend/teacher/comforter/playmate/confidante/supporter/ nursemaid and provider both for the children in their care and for the parents who use their service. The childminder might have left school early, married young and become a grandmother at 34, or she might have an honours degree in biochemistry. The childminder might be a young single mum or the middle-aged wife of a busy executive. Almost certainly, though, the childminder will not be that cold, clinical creature conjured up by the word 'minder' but a warm, sensitive, humorous person, never saintly but invariably optimistic – and one who just happens to love children.

ANN GODDARD
(CHAIRMAN OF N.C.M.A. 1977-1981)

# I WANT TO BE A CHILDMINDER

**WHAT DO I DO?**

If you want to look after other people's children in your own home you must **REGISTER** with your local Social Services Department.

**WHY?**

Well, the short answer is that it is illegal not to and you could be prosecuted for failing to tell your local authority that you are minding. A more positive reason, however, is that registration puts you in touch with other childminders who might be organising activities in your area and with the childminding workers employed by the Social Services Department. They may well be able to offer lots of help and support such as drop-in centres, toy libraries, training courses or the loan of big equipment such as fire-guards and double buggies.

**WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?**

The Nurseries and Childminders Regulation Act 1948 (which was updated by the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968) says that you must register with the Social Services Department if you care for a child to whom you are not closely related, in your own home, for two hours or more a day for reward (any form of payment).

**HOW DO I REGISTER?**

Visit or phone your local Social Services Office (under the name of your council in the phone book) and ask to speak to the person who registers childminders. Initially, this is all the law requires of you – it is then up to the Social Services Department to send someone to talk to you about childminding and to take a look at your home. She will then make recommendations about safety items which you might need such as fire-guards and stair-gates and will discuss child care with you.

**WHAT ELSE WILL THEY WANT TO KNOW?**

They will want to know your reasons for taking up the work and to make sure that you have thought about how you will do the job. You, and anyone else over 16 in your house, will be asked about any child care you have done in the past and they will want to know that you are all in good health – you will probably be asked to have a routine chest x-ray. Other checks and references might also be taken up with bodies such as the police, health visitors and housing departments.

## HOW MANY CHILDREN CAN I MIND?

Most local authorities will only register you to care for a total of three under-5s including your own and any fostered child in this age group, but some local authorities will let you take more children if you have a regular helper. Many childminders also look after older children after school and in the holidays – you should ask your childminding adviser about this.

## WHAT THEN?

The childminding adviser will tell you whether or not you can begin to mind children but it might take up to six months for your registration certificate to come through. The delay will be because many departments have to have registrations approved by a series of individuals or council committees. The child-minding adviser will then visit you regularly (this should be every few months) to make sure that things are going well. You can also call her at any time if you have problems, so make sure you take her name and telephone number.

## ARE THERE ANY FRINGE BENEFITS?

As we have said, a major benefit of registration is that you will be put in touch with other childminders in your area and will find out about childminders' groups and the events which they organise. This can be a great source of support and companionship.

Also, the Social Services Department might have training courses and toy and equipment loan schemes for registered minders and they might be willing to refer children to you and, in some cases, pay you to take them (see 'Money and Business' later in this book). Registered childminders are also eligible for free milk: one third of a pint per child per day. The procedure appears complicated at first but we strongly recommend that you apply as this is the only benefit to which all registered childminders are entitled **AS A RIGHT**. Ask your childminding adviser for form WF/DN 15. Registered childminders can also take out a special childminders' insurance, available through the NCMA: a vital precaution when you are responsible for other people's children. (See section on 'Money and Business'.)

# NOW I'M REGISTERED . . .
# HOW DO I DO THE JOB?

## PLANNING

Many men seem to think that because women are at home and don't 'go out' to work they have nothing to do!

Childminding is a positive job: although you will be 'at home' you will be a working mother. Your family need to understand this from the start, otherwise they may think you will have time to do all kinds of things from mending punctures weekly for your son to answering the phone for your husband's football/bingo club, not to mention laundering the team's shirts, etc. etc.

You will need to talk about all aspects of the job with your husband or partner and with your own children. Children whether they are at home or school will be *sharing you and their own home – space or territory* with other children, for very young children this may not be easy – and the same goes for husbands!

Older children should be encouraged to put their own toys and precious possessions away, younger ones who do not understand 'sharing' will be possessive about their things and should not be made to share them with other children.

Try to plan your days so that there is time for being with your own children alone, to listen, to talk and to play whenever you can. Treats are no substitute for your time.

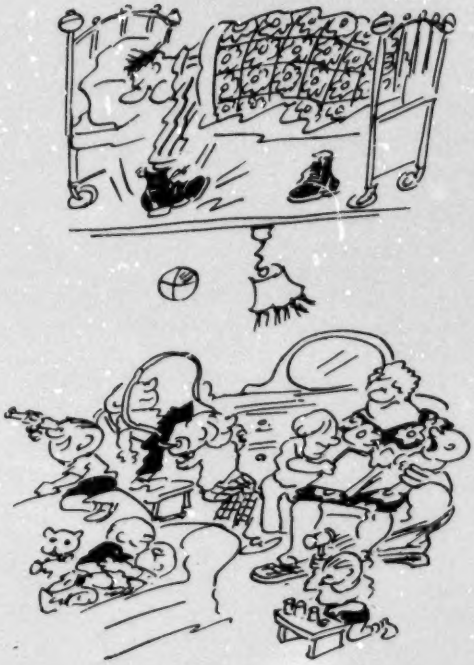
Try also to have some time for yourself and your husband every day. Everyone needs time to relax and if you're doing two jobs this is only possible by planning your day and sometimes saying "No!"

Childminding is a very worthwhile, important job; don't belittle it by pretending that you can take on other jobs at the same time.

**WHEN CAN I DO THE HOUSEWORK?**

Some household chores can be done during the day, the minded child will feel more 'at home' if he sees you doing the things his mother does and is able to help; children enjoy polishing things, scrubbing, all those lovely bubbles, laying the table and preparing colourful vegetables for lunch, going shopping etc.

Most of the jobs you do 'by hand' can be shared with the children. Remember, household machinery can be dangerous, better to use this when the younger children are in bed or not at home.



Whose house is it anyway?

**WILL I NEED ANY EXTRA EQUIPMENT?** You may need to buy fire-guards and stair-gates, and a cupboard to keep toys and play equipment in. It is useful to have low shelves somewhere either on a wall or in a cupboard so that the children can choose the toys themselves *and* put them away.

Start collecting containers for jigsaws, lego and other small items, boxes and cartons can be covered and labelled.

You will need at least one table which has a wipe clean surface for messy play, paint, dough etc., or a plastic cover. A low table will be useful for the tinies.

A step and seat for the loo may be necessary.

Some local authorities insist on a fire blanket but they or your local NCMA group may be able to help with this, also with the hire or loan of other equipment, buggies and fire-guards, cooker guards etc.

Rugs or blankets are useful for throwing over settees or armchairs and for babies and crawlers on the living room carpet, and make sure that you have a quiet place for the children to sleep or to rest if they aren't feeling well.

Some childminders will have enough space to give the children a playroom to themselves but, if you can't do this, then take a look at the arrangement of your home and try to create as much space as possible in which the children can play. They need to be able to spread out and play freely with their toys.

**TALKING OF TOYS . . .**

If you have or have had children of your own then you might already have a good stock of toys. If not, it's worth investing in good, hardwearing, wooden toys which will last and will be of some educational value to the children. Your childminding adviser will be able to make suggestions and there might be a toy library from which you can borrow. Also, take a look at *The Good Toy Guide* which is published every year: it should be in your library.

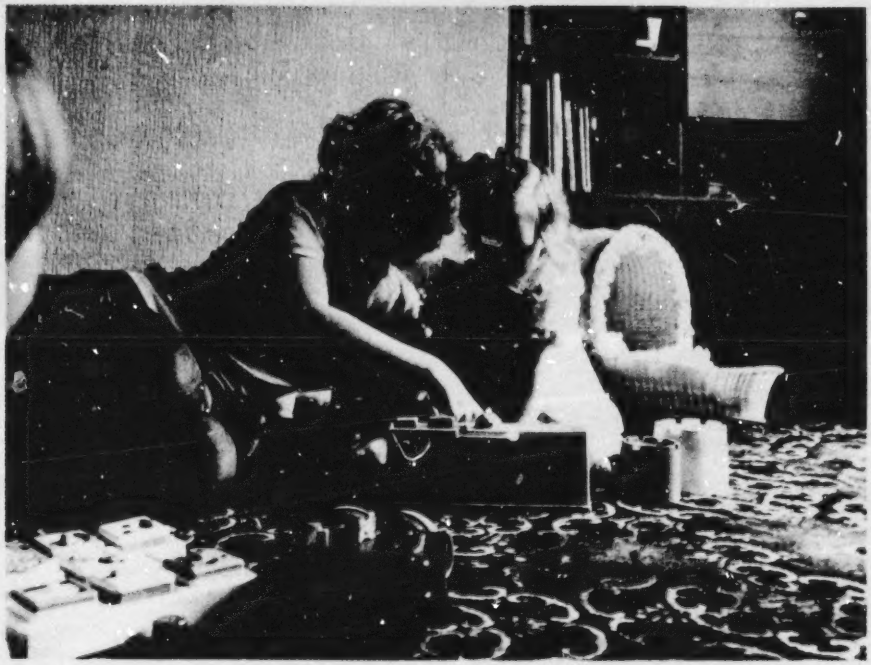


Photo: Cleveland County Council

This little girl is playing with a pop-up toy which teaches her to recognise shapes. The stacking 'castles' by her side will help even small babies to recognise shapes and colours and, as children grow, they will build them into more elaborate games.

"I used to think that I couldn't do all these clever things with the children and I got embarrassed about reading stories out loud, things like that. But it gets to be a habit and now I don't think about it at all: you can't get embarrassed with kids like you can with adults, 'cos they don't see it like that, they don't think I'm making a fool of myself, they just think it's Auntie Gwen reading them a story!" — *Yorkshire childminder*

**DO I NEED TO TAKE EXTRA SAFETY PRECAUTIONS BEFORE MINDING?**

Yes – your family is used to your home, other children may have accidents if you don't take extra care, so check all hazard areas. Take a good look at all the following areas on your feet, then kneel or bend down to child level and look again!

| | |
|---|---|
| **Electric Plugs and Sockets** | Are they broken or over loaded? Remember, your televisions are live when plugged in: the voltage is very high! |
| **Flexes and Leads** | Are they too long or trailing for small hands and feet to catch in? |
| **Cookers** | Are pan handles and knobs out of reach? A cooker guard is an added precaution if children spend a lot of time in your kitchen. |
| **Fires** | All fires must be guarded firmly. Your childminding adviser will talk to you about this. |
| **Poisons** | Household cleaning materials and medicines must be in high cupboards out of reach, not under the sink or on your bedside table. |
| **Sharp Objects** | Knives, scissors, etc. must be kept out of reach, a magnetised holder in the kitchen high on the wall is helpful. Sharp edges on radiators, furniture, etc. may need protecting with padding. |
| **High Chairs and Seats** | Make sure that any harness for babies and toddlers is secure. |
| **Stairs** | You may need a gate, again your adviser will comment on this. |

**Small Objects**

Babies will swallow any small bits and pieces, buttons, screws, bits of lego, etc. Make sure they're not left lying about. The same goes for small sweets, peanuts etc.

When you are sure your home is as safe as it can be, prepare yourself in case of an emergency. Make sure you have:

1. Access to a telephone.
2. Someone to call on in an emergency who could care for the children if you have to leave them, it may be a neighbour or another minder.
3. Keep the following telephone numbers *by the phone:*
   a. Child's parents' home and work numbers.
   b. Child's GP and your GP.
   c. Local clinic and hospital.
   d. Your emergency neighbour's number.
   e. Your Social Worker, or local office.
4. Keep records of:
   a. Child's parents' names and addresses at home and at work.
   b. Any previous illness or treatment the child has had, injections received, etc.

If you have to take the child to a doctor or hospital, take this record with you, they may need to contact parents.

5. Take out insurance against accidents. (See section on 'Money and Business'.)
6. Keep a simple First Aid Box and a copy of a basic guide such as the Health Education Council's *Play It Safe*!

For copies of this book, contact your local Health Education Unit (look under the name of your Area Health Authority in the phone book). If you have difficulties, contact the Health Education Council direct.

"Children need to have comfort and cuddles as well as all the right toys and equipment. They need to know that you really care about them." — *Harlow childminder.*

## What to put in a first aid kit

1. Box of adhesive dressings (various sizes)
2. Box of sterile gauze dressings (various sizes) – for cuts
3. Small packet of paper tissues – to use as temporary sterile dressings
4. 2 or 3 cotton bandages
5. 2 or 3 crepe bandages – for sprains
6. Triangular bandage, or clean old linen or cotton tea towel, or other cotton cloth – to use as a sling or as a large dressing for a burn or scald
7. Small roll of cotton wool – for padding
8. Blunt-ended scissors
9. Safety pins and roll of adhesive tape – for fastening dress[illegible]d slings
10. Plastic bottle of ready-to-use (diluted) disinfectant e.g. hydrogen peroxide
11. Small bar of soap – for washing dirty wounds
12. Antiseptic cream – for minor cuts etc.

Always keep a first aid kit in the house. Keep another in the car. And always take a kit away on holiday with you.

Reproduced from the booklet *Play It Safe* with kind permission of the Health Education Council.

## HEALTH VISITORS

Many childminders find that their health visitor is a valuable member of their support team. Health visitors have a responsibility to check the health of all under-fives in their areas (most are now attached to a GP's practice) and we would recommend that you contact your own child's health visitor (if you have an under-five) to let her know that you are minding. If you don't have an under-five of your own, ask your children's parents to inform their own health visitor that you will be caring for the child. Most health visitors will be happy to see a child in your home if that is where he or she spends most of the time. Health visitors will also be operating Child Health Clinics in your area and you could go there to make contact with them instead.

Always make sure, however, that the parents know you are making these contacts – they may want to come with you to the clinic and the staff will certainly want to know that you have their permission to make the visit.

NCMA maintains formal links with the Health Visitors' Association and we will be happy to take up any problems or pass on any comments in this area.

## TREATMENT

Some childminders have found that they have been refused treatment for the children in their care because the parents were not present. Remember that in any case of real emergency a doctor will *always* treat the child; in less urgent cases it would be well to have a letter of permission from the parent and to make sure that you can reach the parent at short notice; all employers should allow their workers to give out a phone number for emergency use.

# PLAY

## INTRODUCTION

Play is work to a child. We know that during the first seven years of a child's life it learns more, and more rapidly, than at any other time. In order to be able to relax and play productively a child, whether it be a baby, crawler, toddler or pre-schooler, has to feel secure, safe and cared about.

You will find in this chapter various play ideas that you may like to adapt and use but most of all enjoy! All children grow and develop at different rates so that their need for stimulating play activities will be different.

The great thing about learning at any age is that it should be fun. You may feel awkward and clumsy the first few times you try something like painting but soon the pleasure which the children get from this activity will make it all worthwhile.

Photo: Camilla Jessel for The Save the Children Fund

## IMAGINATIVE PLAY

Through imaginative play, children are able to work out situations and emotions and come to terms with things which worry them, or are puzzling to them. They are able to work off a good deal of emotion and aggression during play, which is a useful safety valve. It is much better for a jealous three-year-old to beat an old doll than to bite, scratch or kick another child.

**Wendy House**

Make a private corner by putting a few chairs together, with seats facing inwards for play surfaces, and the backs covered with old bedspreads, curtains or sheets. Save old saucepans, plastic cream and yoghurt pots for your children to play with. Woolworths sell attractive picnic sets for about 40p.

You can make a doll's bed from a shoe-box or a small cardboard box. Towels, scarves and tea-towels can be used as blankets and sheets. A child's imagination can turn this space into a number of different settings such as offices or hospitals etc.

**A Shop**

Save food boxes and containers. Re-seal the ends. For a counter, put the seats of two chairs together. Do not forget to give the children a shopping bag and an old purse.

**Dressing Up**

Collect old clothes, jewellery, handbags, scarves, old curtains which can be used as cloaks or headdresses. You can pick up interesting clothes cheaply at jumble sales, e.g. evening dresses or uniforms.

## PAINTING

This is fun for all ages and a lot of cleaning can be avoided by covering surfaces with newspaper or polythene, giving the children an overall and using paint pots that don't spill easily.

**Paint**

Powder paint mixed with a little powdered glue and water is a good way of making the materials go further.

**Paper**

Large sheets of paper can be bought from toy shops but are often expensive. Print works usually have odd sized paper offcuts they don't want, though you can always use an old newspaper as a substitute.

**Paint Pots**

These can be bought at toyshops but can be made from a tin that has a secure lid. All that is needed is a hole large enough for the brush to fit in. Castella cigar tins or large yoghurt pots are ideal for this purpose, but do watch out for jagged edges.

Children learn to draw by themselves, there is no need to show them how, all they require are materials and the opportunity. Fingerpainting – by using a mixture of powder paints, glue and some washing-up liquid it is possible to paint with fingers and hands, daubing a formica surface or table top provides an alternative to the conventional brush painting.

If you press a piece of paper over this you will then have a 'print' which the child can put up on the wall. Remember, it's very important to display the things which the children make and to give them to Mum when she comes at the end of the day. In this way the children will see that what they do is important to you and they will be willing to go on and do more.

## WRITING AND DRAWING

When your child is able to hold a pencil properly and has good control over it, you may want to show him how to write his own name. If so, please *do not* teach him capital letters. They will be taught small letters at school and it is very confusing for them to learn two different ways. When a child first learns to read he sees the word as a whole, not the individual letters, and so the shape of the word is very important. With capital letters the outline of the word is not as easily recognised as with small letters. 'Robert' has a very different outline from 'Joanne' whereas the outline is the same in 'ROBERT' and 'JOANNE'. Do not give your child just a biro to write and draw with. They need thick pencils, wax crayons and chalks.

## WATER PLAY

This is a very important activity and one which children enjoy virtually from before birth! It is cheap, easy to provide and extremely satisfying, all of which make it ideal for play in the home.

You will need:

*Water* – either in the sink, or in a bowl on the table.

*Pouring equipment* – doll's teapot, small watering can etc.

*Plastic beakers.*

*Squeezy bottles* – these can be cut in half and used as a funnel and a beaker. Holes can be punched in them at different heights.

*Spoons and strainers.*

*Plastic tubing and funnels*, which may be bought quite cheaply at Boots.

*Boats*, made out of walnut shells, bits of balsa wood, leaves, matchboxes – in fact, anything light or hollow.

*Do take care* that the water in the taps is not too hot for the children, and that you do not give them anything made of glass or easily rusted metal.

**Bubble Play**

This is a mixture of washing-up liquid and water, with either a bubble pipe or a piece of tubing.

As well as being enjoyable and satisfying, water play teaches children a great deal about basic concepts of mathematics – such as volume and capacity.

Photo: Sue Owen

Sand and water play can easily be provided in a home: here a baby's bath rests on two low chairs. The child's 'apron' is a plastic carrier with the bottom cut off.

## DOUGH

Playdough is a good, tactile material. Younger children will simply rub it through their fingers or press it on the table but with a few extra tools: pastry cutters, a small rolling-pin, blunt scissors and knives – older children can enjoy making 'cakes', rolling the dough and cutting it up.

If the dough is kept in a plastic bag or sealed container it will last for a couple of weeks.

*The Recipe:* Mix 1 cup of flour with one third cup of salt.
Add a little cooking oil to give it texture and enough water to make a dough.
Food colouring or powder paints can be added as necessary.

By adding the same amount of salt as flour, the dough can be baked in a warm oven for a couple of hours.

## OUTDOOR PLAY

It is important to make sure that the children have the chance to go out during the day, both for fresh air and to be able to run about. If you don't have a safe outdoor play space then do try to make time to take them to a park regularly.

Even small babies will benefit from such outings, they enjoy rides and a change of scenery and the company of other children. If you find it difficult to get out then why not twin up with another childminder and help each other or ask your childminding adviser if the Social Services Department can help you by loaning a double buggy or arranging play sessions?

Your local childminders' group or Social Services Department might run a regular drop-in centre for minders and their children or you might be able to arrange to take the children to your local playgroup every week. Children benefit a lot from the company of other children and they enjoy and learn from group activities. But don't forget to tell the parents and to get their permission (see section on 'Money and Business').

The following organisations are involved in pre-school facilities all over the country and would be happy to answer your questions about local provision:

(Remember to enclose a stamped and addressed envelope when you write to NCMA and to other organisations.)

Pre-School Playgroups Association (PPA)
Alford House
Aveline Street
London SE11 5DJ

Toy Libraries Association (Play Matters)
Seabrook House
Wyllyotts Manor
Darkes Lane
Potters Bar EN6 2HL

National Child Care Campaign
75 Kingsway
London WC2

Gingerbread (organisation for single parents)
35 Wellington Street
London WC2

National Playbus Association
St Thomas' Church
St Thomas' Street
Bristol 1

Always have a supply of books for the children to look at alone or to read with you. Libraries will sometimes let childminders have extra tickets and they will be happy to advise on books which are suitable for this age group.

## TALKING

One of the most important things you can do is to talk to the children you care for. Children need to learn to express themselves and to give names to the things around them so you should talk *about* an activity as well as actually *doing* it. This is important at all ages: even though babies cannot answer you back, they are still listening and learning all the time. They watch your face and, in time, will come to associate certain actions with the sounds you make; this is how they learn to speak themselves. With older children you can try to start proper conversations, asking them 'open-ended' questions will lead to longer and more imaginative answers from them, for instance:

*Minder:* There's Mrs. Jones, do you think she's going shopping?
*Child:* Yes.

or . . .

*Minder:* There's Mrs. Jones, where do you think she's going?
*Child:* She's probably going to see Princess Diana . . .

The second exchange can lead you on to all sorts of interesting discussions, whereas the first just stops dead. The same kind of thing applies when you are playing with the children. Try to start discussions about the things you are doing or the books you are reading and you will find that the children pick up this habit and talk to each other as well as to you.

## CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

There is a whole range of 'special needs' which you might come across in your work as a child-minder, especially if you are sponsored by your local authority to care for a child whom they have referred. You might have a child with a physical or mental handicap, a child who is slow to develop or a child with a difficult home situation, who may have been the victim of violence. You don't need to be an expert to care for these children: they need love and attention in just the same way as other children, but you might have to change your timetable in order to devote more time to them.

For instance, children who exhibit 'behaviour problems' and seem to be demanding attention are probably doing *just that* and you should give them attention while always remembering to include your other children: make clear that the child can't get attention at the expense of others. Other children are the best allies you have, if you can draw them all together in games and activities then they will help each other. But the most important thing you can do is to make sure that you have adequate information about any children with special needs. If they are referred by Social Services, insist on regular follow-up and advice from your worker and, in all cases, spend as much time as you can talking to the parents, they will have useful knowledge for you and, in the case of handicapped children, will have professionals to help them who may also be willing to help you. Above all, don't be afraid to ask for help: it's a sign of strength, not weakness!

## CHILDREN FROM OTHER CULTURES

Similarly, with children from different ethnic groups from your own: make sure that you have all the information you need, such as the child's correct name (what he or she is usually called at home); what food the child should eat and any religious customs which have to be observed. If there is a language problem, ask the parents to come with a person who can translate so that you can cover all the points mentioned in our section on *Parents*. A child who cannot speak your language will need more time spent on simple information and directions, you will have to use more gestures and examples, repeat words frequently and reassure them with hugs. Some of the NCMA's leaflets have been translated into Asian languages and the staff at Bromley will be happy to help if you have problems connected with multi-cultural childminding.

Photo: Camilla Jessel for The Save the Children Fund

# LEARNING MORE

Your own experience of bringing up a family is a good beginning; however, there is always more to learn about the skills needed to care for a group of children from different families.

Childminding is different from any other form of day care for children and, of course, every child is different, they cannot all be treated the same.

Items on child care in books, magazines and leaflets, on the radio and on TV all offer opportunities to learn more.

In some areas there will be a local childminders' group where minders share their experiences and knowledge.

Some local authorities run courses for childminders and it's worth asking your childminding adviser what is available.

The Pre-School Playgroups Association run courses for playgroup people and others in most parts of the country on play, etc.

If you would like to meet other minders in a group, NCMA will be pleased to help you. We also produce a reading list on childminding and you can learn more about play and child care from the following books:


Elizabeth Matterson
*Play with a Purpose for the Under Sevens*, Penguin

and

*This Little Puffin*, Penguin (Puffin Books)

Penelope Leach
*Babyhood*, Penguin

J. Lucas and V. McKennell
*The Penguin Book of Playgroups*, Penguin

Alison Clarke-Stewart
*Day Care*, Fontana

Willem van der Eyken
*The Pre-School Years*, Penguin

# WHAT ARE WE GOING TO EAT?

Solving this problem might seem easy for those of you who are bringing up your own families or have already done so. When you begin to child-mind, however, you have an excellent opportunity to sit back and think about the type of food which you and your family eat and maybe to plan a new series of nutritious meals for them and for the children you will be caring for. Remember, if the children are with you all day long, the meal which you give them at mid-day might be their main meal and you have a responsibility to see that they have a balanced diet containing all the nutrients which will help to build strong and healthy adults. The bodies, like the minds, of young children grow very fast and a wide variety of food is necessary to ensure that they develop properly, just as their physical and mental skills will develop through play activities. It isn't just the body you can *see* which is growing, all the child's internal organs are developing at this age: heart, bones, brain, teeth, kidneys etc., and good food is also needed to replace and repair parts of the body which grow continually throughout our lives such as hair, nails and skin. Outward signs of poor health such as spots, bad teeth, broken nails, runny noses etc. can be indications that the child is not receiving an adequate diet. Many people now supplement their own and their children's diet with vitamin pills: how much better if you can ensure that they get all the B vitamins and vitamin C which they need through an adequate supply of fresh fruit and vegetables.

**WON'T ALL THIS COST A LOT OF MONEY?**

Not necessarily . . . especially if you can sit back and do a bit of planning each week. Fresh foods are, of course, always much cheaper when they are 'in season' and you can tell at a glance what are the week's good buys from your green-grocer or fish-monger (the same system applies in the supermarket too!). If you are lucky enough to have a freezer then you can buy up large stocks when things are cheap and freeze them for use in the future; if not, just get enough for the week and find yourself a good, simple recipe which will suggest lots of different ways of preparing the same foods!

Lentils and beans can be a very nutritious and cheap way of feeding large numbers. You can buy large quantities of these dried 'pulses' from nearly all supermarkets now at very low prices; they usually have to be soaked overnight and then boiled for two to three hours (until completely tender) before being made up into stews, casseroles, soups, even 'hamburgers'; to improve their flavour you can add things like tomatoes (fresh or canned), herbs and spices or bits of bacon. A pressure cooker will help with the long cooking time needed. Our good old stand-by of baked beans is really just a highly processed version of this type of food and is very good for children.

They are also good 'mashing' foods which are easier for young children to eat, as are mashed potato, shepherds pie, fish pie, fish cakes, rice and dal, scrambled eggs and mince. Another household gadget, the blender, will help with this – blenders are also invaluable for producing your own cheap baby foods at home. Remember, though, that children have to learn to chew: they shouldn't be given too much mashed food.

Below we list foods which all children need together with some hints on how to provide them cheaply and easily:

**MILK**

You are allowed one third of a pint daily for each child you mind (free from the DHSS, see section: *I Want to be a Childminder*) but it won't hurt them to have more than this. Dried milk is a useful stand-by for older children, but *not* for babies. Milk can be made up into milk jellies, blancmange and sauces and they can have yoghurt as a change.

**CHEESE**

You can often buy cheese pieces cheaply which can be grated onto other meals e.g. baked beans or spaghetti or scrambled eggs. Children often like cottage cheese and cream cheese too, especially if they are spiced up with something like marmite, or fruit salad, but cream cheese doesn't have the protein of regular cheese.

**EGGS**

Very good for children and weaning babies (especially the yolks) if given in moderation – after all, they might be getting eggs for breakfast as well . . .

**MEAT**

Children should have meat (or a substitute such as mince made from soya) regularly. This doesn't have to be expensive: stewing lamb, mince, kidney, liver and chicken joints are all cheaper and they don't need large portions in order to get the protein, iron and nutrients which they provide.

**FISH**

Fewer people cook fresh fish these days but it can be very cheap and is *very* good for you. The cheaper, oily fish and tinned fish such as sardines and tuna is, interestingly, as good for you as the expensive stuff. Don't forget fish fingers either.

**BREAD**

Needless to say the wholemeal loaves which are so easy to find these days are much better than the sliced, white variety as they contain more fibre and they taste nicer! Breakfast cereals, brown rice and pasta are also useful additions to a meal.

Cont. after centre pages..

# SPOT THE DELIBERATE MISTAKE....

We created this mock-up of an unsafe childminding situation for an article in Woman magazine.
How many safety hazards can you spot? We found 14: have a close look and then turn to the back page for our conclusions (and please let us know if you come up with more).

Photo: Courtesy *Woman*.



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**FRUIT**

Children (and adults) should try to have some fresh fruit every day. Why not have apple or tangerine pieces for a mid-morning snack instead of crisps or sweet biscuits? Fresh fruit juice (the unsweetened kind) is also good for snacks or to accompany meals.

**VEGETABLES**

The old maxim about "two veg." is good to stick to. This could mean potatoes together with a fresh boiled vegetable or salad. But it isn't necessary always to cook the vegetables, they are just as good for you eaten raw. Try grated carrots with sultanas or slices of tomatoes and mushrooms. Again, if you have a freezer, you can buy frozen vegetables in bulk much more cheaply.

**BUTTER AND MARGE**

Don't use too much in the way of fats and oils. Margarine is just as good for you as butter and much cheaper; it is also a valuable source of vitamin D, which might be missing from the diets of some Asian children.

**SUGAR AND SPICE . . .**

Sugar and salt, to be more precise, are not very good for you. Both are essential to good health but natural foods contain quite enough of each and it shouldn't be necessary to add any when you cook. Processed foods will have them added already. Sweets and cakes and sweet drinks such as squash and cola can contribute to tooth decay in children and adults and they build up eating habits in children which can lead to overweight later on.

**DRINKS**

All children need plenty to drink and water is cheap! You can add to the variety with milk drinks, cocoa, fruit juice and weak tea and coffee. Don't forget to cool the children's drinks before you put them out to avoid burnt mouths and scalding.

A supermarket's own brand will often be just as good, and much cheaper than the well known names and it might be worth trying to get to know a couple of your local shop-keepers: tell them that you are childminding and are on the look-out for good, cheap food for the children, then they might save special bargains for you. Markets, of course, are very good for bargain hunting and the children will probably enjoy coming with you and seeing the production of their meal right through from beginning to end . . .

As we say earlier, it helps to take the strain off you if you can sit down at the weekend and plan the week's meals (we have met some minders who plan for a month at a time!). But you do need a freezer if you're going to do that kind of planning and then, of course, you have to remember to take things out in time for them to thaw!

## BABIES

We mention baby foods in our section on 'Money and Business' but it's worth saying again that you and/or the parents might prefer to have the baby's food brought ready-made and to make a reduction in your fee for this. Some minders are happy to mix babies' bottle feeds, but even a small change in composition can upset a baby's stomach and this can be distressing for you and for the parents. If you have a baby between 4 and 6 months old you will also be involved in weaning (moving the baby gradually onto solid foods) so you might like the parents to bring some pureed food or tins of baby food so that you can start giving the child a spoonful or two with his or her feeds. Ready made baby foods can be expensive so, again, you might want to reduce your own charges and have the parents bring these themselves.

## OTHER PEOPLE'S FOOD . . .

Many people in Britain think only in terms of the traditional "meat and two veg." diet but our diet has changed dramatically over the last twenty years or so as we have learnt more about nutrition and have benefited from the introduction of foreign foods into our shops and restaurants. There is a much wider variety of food available to us now than ever before and parents are now more likely to ask for different foods for their children. Many parents are concerned that the children learn to eat a variety of foods and more parents than ever will be stipulating vegetarian diets for their children. As you can see from our list above, it is perfectly possible to give children a balanced diet without using meat and, if you have one vegetarian child, you might want to try giving all the children the same meals so that you avoid squabbles at the table. This could also be true for children from other cultures who might not be able to eat meat for religious reasons. Some Sikh and Hindu children will not be able to eat beef and Muslim parents might not want the children to eat pork or bacon. Again, as with everything else, our

most basic advice is that you consult the parents before you start to mind the child and make sure that you are clear about their food requirements. If you think it will be difficult to stick to their diet then suggest that they bring the child's food, at least until you feel more confident about providing it yourself; this will avoid a lot of bad feeling and misunderstanding later.

"I'm not a good cook, I know that, I have to be honest about it. But children don't go on about cooking like grown-ups do and I think I manage alright, I always have lots of fruit in the house because it's a good snack and I try to give them three things for lunch, you know, fish fingers and a frozen vegetable and some potatoes: even I can boil potatoes!"

*— Northern Ireland childminder*

## TABLE MANNERS

*"no one seems to bother much about manners any more, but I think it's important. These children are eating in my home, with my own kids, and I see it as a chance to turn them into civilised people. It shouldn't be like the feeding time at the zoo!"*

Trafford minder.

No, it certainly shouldn't be like feeding time at the zoo, you'd soon get fed up with that and the parents won't thank you for letting their children get away with messy eating. Try to encourage older babies to begin to feed themselves: it takes longer and, at first, there will be more mess to clear up but in the long run they will benefit from this independence. Older children should be introduced to knives, forks and spoons and the different uses of each and they can be encouraged to wait on each other, pass things around the table and sit quietly until everyone has finished. Meal times are a good chance to talk as a group and this is easier if there is a calm atmosphere.

# MONEY & BUSINESS

## HOW MUCH SHOULD I CHARGE?

This is probably one of the biggest questions for the new childminder and, because we received so many queries about it, the Association now produces a leaflet called *Guidelines on Pay and Conditions* which is updated every year. All members of the Association receive this leaflet free. It includes a recommended minimum charge for a full week's care plus suggested hourly rates, holiday and sickness charges, retainers and advice on charging separately for meals, after school care, nappies etc.

Most childminders will work out a set weekly fee per child but it is worth bearing the following points in mind:

. . . Some childminders charge less for two or more children from the same family as parents might not, otherwise, be able to afford the fees. This is up to you to negotiate with the parents.

. . . Similarly, many low waged parents cannot afford the more realistic charges which childminders are now making and may threaten to take the child elsewhere. It is well worth talking this out with parents, explain that good care costs money and you want to be able to provide good food and equipment for the children without being exploited yourself. Try to come to an arrangement with which you are both satisfied. It is worth contacting your childminding adviser at the Social Services Department to find out if any *subsidy schemes* are available for low waged parents. These are schemes whereby the local authority will pay for the child to come to you or will make up the difference between what you charge and what the parent can afford.

. . . Ask your childminding adviser or your local childminding association what other minders in the area are charging. This will give you a good idea what to charge and you will be able to assure parents that they are paying an accepted fee and couldn't get good child care at a lower price from someone else.

. . . You may not want to charge by the week, especially if you only have the child for a few hours per day or after school. Similarly, you might want to make a separate charge for meals and outings or ask the parents to bring the child's food. All these arrangements are perfectly acceptable and, again, we would recommend that you follow NCMA guidelines and/or the usual rates for your area. If you have a child who needs a special diet for religious or health reasons it is sometimes easier to have his parents bring the food. The same goes for babies: many childminders prefer the parents to mix the child's feeds and bring babyfood with which the child is familiar. You might then be able to consider a reduction in your normal charges. We do not recommend that you get into the habit of washing nappies or providing disposables; this is a separate service and you shouldn't have to do more than rinse out a dirty nappy. If you do agree to extras like this you should make a charge for it.

. . . Some childminders put a lot of effort into taking children to playgrounds and drop-in centres or on outings. This is good practice but, again, it might involve you in a lot of extra costs. It is reasonable to ask the parent to pay playgroup fees as you still have to be *available* for that child. Equally, you can ask parents to pay extra costs incurred on outings (provided you have asked them first, of course). You should always ask the parent's permission if you are taking the child on a special outing and you might also want to have them sign a permission slip if outings are not mentioned in your contract.

. . . Money often causes problems between parents and minders. It is difficult to ask for extra or for late payments when you know the family so well and have come to love the child. In any argument between adults it is likely to be the child who suffers most. Consequently, it is important to settle all money questions right at the beginning of the childminding arrangement. *Always* use a contract (NCMA provide contract forms) and go through it carefully with the parents to make sure that everything is understood and agreed to. Don't be embarrassed about this, the parent should be pleased to see that you work in a business-like fashion and take the job seriously. An hour or so spent on this now can save days of heart-ache later. You may also wish to ask for payment in advance each week which solves problems of children not turning up and parents who ask for discounts as well as parents who run out of money before the end of the week.

. . . Don't be frightened by the last section: these are just *some* problems encountered by *some* minders. As long as you take your job seriously, and expect prompt and adequate pay for it, other people will take you seriously also. Childminding is still a very flexible job and it is up to you to organise it as you would wish; just remember that it is also a highly responsible job and, when you count up your expenses at the end of the week, you should be left with a reasonable salary.

. . . Lastly, don't forget your record-keeping. We have recommended that you use a contract form with parents but you should also sit down with them and fill in a sheet of information on their child. This will cover all important medical facts such as immunizations, allergies, doctor's names etc. as well as ways of contacting the

parents in an emergency. NCMA produces both contract and information sheets, and attendance registers for your use. You will also need to keep accounts for tax and social security purposes (see next section) with a cash and expenses book and a box to keep all your receipts. Records are also important for claiming your free milk allowance as you have to send in details of the numbers of children being minded every day. Attendance records are useful for many other purposes also, especially when used to record additional information such as accidents or when treatment has to be given for illness and in cases where you have any difficulties over payment. You never know when such information might be needed.

## INSURANCE

It is very important to be insured against accidents to the children in your care or any damage which they might do to someone else's property.

On the whole, childminders seem to be a careful breed and we hear of very few major accidents but there have been some well publicised cases in which childminders have been liable for large damages or legal fees. Then, also, there are the day-to-day problems such as little Tracy breaking the neighbour's window with a well-aimed football. The NCMA insurance would cover you for such costs. A reduced premium has been specially negotiated with the Phoenix Assurance Company for registered minders who are members of the Association, so contact the Bromley office for details.

## TAX AND SOCIAL SECURITY

This has always been a murky area for childminders and, unfortunately, you cannot expect enlightenment from tax and social security officials. Things are improving but it is still possible to meet officials who will make rulings about childminders' earnings without knowing what a childminder is. Again, the NCMA publishes a leaflet which provides up to date information on tax and benefits for childminders and, if you have any difficulty in this area, please contact the Bromley office and let us know; we have on-going discussions with the Inland Revenue and the DHSS and we should be able to sort out the muddle for you.

*This is how things stand at present:*

### National Insurance

Most childminders do not earn enough, after expenses, to pay national insurance. You should contact your local DHSS office and ask to apply for a 'certificate of exemption'. It is important to do this as you might be asked for back payment if you have not claimed exemption. Higher earners will have to pay class 2 contributions unless they are women who qualify for 'reduced liability'. Refer to NCMA's leaflet or the local DHSS to find out about current earnings limits.

**Taxation**

As with national insurance, childminders earning less than a certain amount per year after expenses will not have to pay tax so you should check up with the NCMA leaflet or your local tax office to find out what the current limit is. Married women have to enter their earnings on their husband's income tax return so you should always keep good records of your income and expenditure for the year.

**Supplementary benefit**

If you or your husband are claiming supplementary benefit, only 1/3 of your earnings as a childminder is recognised as income. This was written into the law in November 1980 and is *not* open to the discretion of a benefit officer. You should keep the following information on file in case of any difficulty over this:

> *Regulation 10 (2) (c) of the Supplementary Benefit (Resources) Regulations 1981: Child-minding fees*
> 6404 When a claimant is paid for looking after other people's children in her home during the day, treat one-third of the payment as earnings, subject to the normal disregard.

N.B. What this means is that you or your husband's supplementary benefit *can* be reduced because you are child-minding but this reduction is calculated only on the basis of 1/3 of your earnings so, in most cases, it is still worth continuing to childmind.

**Unemployment and sickness benefits, and Family Income Supplement**

For all these benefits your income is considered to be your total takings less *your actual expenses.* Consequently, you should keep detailed accounts of your income and expenditure as you could be asked to produce them. Remember, for childminding purposes you can claim a proportion of your heating and lighting bills and food bills as expenses plus, of course, anything you buy specifically for the children to eat or play with and a proportion of the wear and tear on your home. In the case of Family Income Supplement the benefit runs for a full year regardless of changes in circumstance so, if you start minding, F.I.S. payments will not be affected until the end of the 52 week period of your claim.

This is only an outline of the regulations and we have not mentioned any actual sums of money as these can be outdated so quickly. If you are in any doubt consult the Association's leaflet or call the Bromley office.

"You do have bad days, there's no getting away from it, but that's life, everyone has bad days. They have bad days in the nursery and my daughter's teacher has *terrible* days. Children understand, well they have to learn about things like that, don't they? It's more like real life . . . as long as it doesn't happen every day, of course." — *London minder*

# PARENTS

The parents are the most important people in the lives of the children you care for and they will be very important to you too! It is essential to try to establish a good relationship with parents right from the start: if the children see that you are all friends then they will feel much happier about staying in your home. Sometimes this is not easy because parents may feel very threatened by having to leave their child with you every day; they might feel guilty and, of course, they will miss the child. The handing over of money, also, can cause a lot of problems (see 'Money and Business' for suggestions on this).

Remember that parents might have had a lot of trouble finding good child care and they might not know very much about childminding; on top of this they might have heard some 'scandal stories' about childminders. So, it will be up to you to reassure them; if you show confidence in your ability to care for their child without taking him or her over completely, then you will be getting off to a good start. It is important to appear business-like, so have the contract form ready and a check-list of things to be covered during the parents' first visit such as: fees, hours, over-time, toys, potty training, sleep times and diet. And don't forget discipline! Strictly, it is against the law to smack another person's child and this is also not the most effective way of changing a child's behaviour. You should explain to the parents that their child will have to learn to live happily with a group of other children in your home and that you would like them to back up

your (few) rules about behaviour. One parent/minder partnership we know has solved the problems by having the minder reprimand the child when in her home even if the mother is present: if you have a fixed system like this than the child won't be able to play off one against the other.

Help the parents to ask you the right questions: the questions which will give them a good idea of how you work and what they can expect from you; but don't make it too formal you can cover all this at the kitchen table over a cup of tea - much more information comes out during a chat than during an interview! Why not describe a typical day to them? Offer to show them around the house (they may be too shy to ask for this). You can then send them away with a copy of the contract and with an information form to fill in. . . by the time they come for a second visit they will have thought of lots more questions to ask you. As you can see, we are assuming that the parents, and the child, will have more than one visit with you before the starting date. This is very important, not only for the parents' peace of mind but also to help the child settle in. Ask if the parents can stay for an hour or so with the child a couple of times before he or she is left alone with you and maybe leave the child for short periods before making a full day of it (especially if the child has not been away from home before). All this will require planning but it will pay off in terms of your relationship with the parents and the happiness of the child. If it can't be done (Mum *has* to start work on Monday morning) then at least try to fit in a visit or two in the short time available, even if this is during your precious weekend. Let the parents know that you take their child's happiness seriously and that this is *important*.

**In the long term. . .**

It's important to start off on the right footing but you then need to *maintain* a good relationship with parents. If you have an agreed contract and have talked through some of the problems which might arise then you will be well on the way, but it is worth putting aside some time during each week to talk to the parents and bring them up to date on what you are doing with the children and on any future plans you might have. Again, a quiet cup of tea when they pick up the child is probably the best opportunity for this. And don't bottle things up! If you're worried about anything, try to talk it out with the parent as soon as you can: everyone, including the child, will suffer if resentments build up. Many childminders build up very close friendships with 'their' parents and you can often support each other at difficult times, as happened with this childminder from London:

*"I had been minding Jason for six months when his Daddy left home. I hadn't known his mum very well but it was obvious she didn't have no one else to turn to, so I agreed to let him stay with me overnight for a couple of days while she sorted herself out. After that she talked to me a lot and I'm sure it helped Jason as well, I think they might have taken him into care otherwise. . . "*

Some minders like to try to visit the child and parents at home after they have been minding him or her for a few months, this is just another way of building up a relationship, and older children particularly seem to appreciate it: they can show you *their* home and *their* things, so it might be nice to take your own child with you.

A final word. . . however hard you try, there might be some parents, or some children, with whom you just can't get along. If this happens, don't be afraid to say "no" and to stop having the child. All professionals have to make decisions like this sometimes and it will not be in the child's best interests to stay in an unhappy situation.

Photo: Camilla Jessel for The Save the Children Fund

"We often talk among ourselves, the childminders round here, and we all say what an awful job it is, like, and how tired we get, but you notice that none of us ever gives it up! I think you've got to recognise that it's difficult, like, and it takes a lot out of you, but if you like it then there's no other job for you, there's no other job for me . . ." — *East Anglia childminder.*

"I want the children who come to me to have all the chances they would have at a good playgroup or nursery class . . . that's possible now that we have the toy library and now that I can take them out to the drop-in and have them play with other children . . . I feel that when I put a lot into their education, I get more out of it myself." — *Manchester minder.*

# WHERE HAVE ALL THE CHILDREN GONE ?

Of course, there's no point making all these preparations unless you have some children to care for! Many childminders begin the work because a friend or neighbour asks them to care for their child, indeed, many minders only want to care for one particular child and ask their childminding adviser not to put their name on a public list. Others would very much like to have referrals from the Social Services Department – so how can you go about finding children?

1. Ask your adviser: many parents call the Social Services Department looking for registered minders and, if your adviser knows that you have a vacancy, she can give you your name.
2. Word of mouth: most minders seem to find most children this way because parents often prefer to have a personal recommendation from someone who knows you. Word travels fast and if you let people know that you are a registered childminder you will probably have lots of people knocking at the door.
3. Advertising: many childminders advertise their services in local papers. Another way of advertising is to ask local firms, clinics, libraries or schools to put a card on their notice-boards for you. They might want to know details of your registration before they do this.

On the whole the public register kept by the Social Services Department is likely to be your most reliable source of children and you should talk to your adviser if you have any trouble finding children to care for. It's worth remembering also that, in areas of high unemployment, there might not be many mothers out at work and there might not be children who need day care – you might want to discuss this with the childminding adviser before she registers you.

# NATIONAL CHILDMINDING ASSOCIATION

The National Childminding Association was set up in 1977 by a group of childminders, parents and child care workers. A large number of local childminders' groups had been established during the 1970s and it was felt that a National co-ordinating body would enable childminders all over the country to keep in touch with one another and to promote childminding to politicians, the press and the general public at a national level. The idea was floated on the last programme of the BBC television series *Other People's Children*, a series for and about childminders which went out in early 1977. There was an enthusiastic response from viewers to the idea of the National Association and an inaugural meeting was held in Birmingham in the Autumn of the same year.

Now the Association has grown to over 9,000 members; most belong to local groups which affiliate to the NCMA but there are also individual members and corporate members such as Social Services Departments. Anyone is welcome to join the Association if they are interested in child care and childminding in particular. The Association publishes a newsletter every two months called *Who Minds?* which contains information, articles, letters and 'helpful hints'. In the newsletter you will also find details of the Association's insurance scheme for childminders: an essential precaution for anyone taking care of other people's children, a specially reduced premium was negotiated with the Phoenix Assurance Company for members of the Association.

The NCMA also organises two annual events: National Childminding Week in June and the AGM and Conference in October. National Childminding Week is an opportunity for groups all over the country to arrange local events which will attract funds and publicity. The Annual General Meeting is our chance to tell members what we have done in the past year and what is planned for the future. It is also an opportunity for the membership to bring up any criticisms or suggestions it has for the organisation. Our AGM is always twinned with a conference with speakers, exhibitions and discussions.

Photo: Sue Owen

Visitors to NCMA's 1983 Annual General Meeting stop to look at some of the good publicity which childminding attracted during that year.

**Other Activities**

The Association has a number of working parties and sub-committees looking at various aspects of childminding such as training, multi-cultural childminding, registration, pay and conditions, and tax and social security. We are also collaborating with the Open University on the production of training materials for childminders, a project funded by the Department of Health and Social Security.The DHSS is also funding Pilot Regional Development Schemes in the North-East and South-West to look into different ways of supporting childminders.

The Association publishes a number of leaflets and books about childminding including a guide to pay and conditions which is up-dated annually. Leaflets on becoming a childminder and finding a childminder are also available in Asian languages, and we sell a range of promotional items such as T-shirts, badges, balloons and car stickers.

The office staff and Regional Representatives are always willing to answer queries from members and from the general public and will take up problems for members.

**Structure of the Association**

The Association is funded through membership subscriptions and through a grant from the DHSS but it is controlled by a National Executive which is made up of childminders elected from their regions as Regional Representatives. The NEC meets every six weeks to direct the work of the Assocation.

For our purposes, the United Kingdom is divided up into thirteen regions: three National regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and ten regions within England. A call to the office in Bromley will tell you which region you belong to and the name and address of your Regional Representative who is only too happy to help you in any way she can, e.g. by speaking at a local meeting or bringing NCMA supplies to your group.

Photo: Jan Chipps

Merton Childminders Group show off their T-shirts at the Greater London Region Picnic for Childminding Week in 1983. There are hundreds of childminding groups all over the country who work to get better conditions for childminders and children and who manage to enjoy themselves at the same time!

The National Association works to improve conditions for childminders but it is only as strong as its membership: we need you to support our aims, pass on information from your region and let us know what you would like the Association to do. There's strength in numbers and we can only win a better deal for childminders with YOUR help!

# SOME TYPICAL DAYS....

**Sarah is a London childminder who told us about a typical day**

I get up at 6.30am and I get all the children and my husband out of bed and he comes down and makes the breakfast while I do the beds. I get washed and dressed. By the time I get down they have finished breakfast, so they all go upstairs and he supervises their washing while I hoover downstairs and wash up the breakfast dishes and sweep the kitchen floor. Then I go upstairs to finish them off and we leave the house at 8.20am. I drive down to Jenny's to fetch her little one Tim at 8.30 and then we take my two eldest to school and meet Paul, the other child I mind, there. Then we go off to take my youngest, Emma, to nursery and then it's home. I come in and make a coffee and a drink and Tim does his poo in the potty and we have a story and I play with them until about 10.00. Then, if I have washing or ironing to do, I'll do that during the next hour while the children play. Then, about 11.00 we'll have another drink and a story or they might go into the garden and play there; they're both under two and they don't concentrate on things for very long. They have the run of the house, I wouldn't lock them in at all but toys aren't supposed to leave the playroom, they do, though! At their age they just follow you around. We go to the nursery to collect Emma at 12.00 and I take Paul back on our way home. Sometimes we'll all go to my friend Carol's for lunch, she's a childminder as well and, in the afternoon, we might stay with her for a bit, or go shopping or go to the park, or visit somebody else. Then, of course we fetch the older ones from school, including Tim's brother Jake who stays with us until his Mum finishes work. After school . . . well . . we might go to the park again or go home to have tea and watch television and they play: outside if it's Summer, until they go home.

**GLYNIS WASHINGTON, BUTT LANE CHILD-MINDERS GROUP, STAFFORDSHIRE**
**Extract from a letter to the National Child Care Campaign**

As childminders we are more often than not classed as the poor alternative when child care is needed but I readily agree that there are good and bad childminders. Most good childminders care deeply about the quality of care they give the children they mind. Also most childminders are the only form of care for school-age children before and after school and during school holidays. As a group of childminders we hold playgroup sessions once a month (not enough, but all we can finance and accommodate at the moment) we do work flexible hours, most of us do take the children we mind to nursery school and/or playgroup as and when places are available. As a group we have six members caring, between us, for 15 under fives and 13 over fives from Monday to Friday.

My own working day starts at 7.15am when my first schooler arrives and my last child goes, officially, at 5.15 but with overtime this can be as late at 6.30pm. I also mind a handicapped girl of 16 for one hour each morning and afternoon between her parents leaving for work and a bus picking her up and returning her from school. My total weekly fees before expenses are £57.00 a week and out of this I pay for food, toys, excursions, insurance etc. I work an average of 52 hours per week and estimate that my actual profit is approximately £25 weekly, which is less than 50p per hour.

As a group we get little or no support from the Social Services Department and receive no financial aid or help with equipment whatsoever. Any extras, such as trips to the Zoo, playgroups etc., are from our own fundraising.

The only strong support we have is from our local health visitor and our County Childminding Adviser. We are members of the NCMA and feel that this is going to be our strongest form of support.

As a mother of two and a trained nursery nurse I fully appreciate that every child should have a right to nursery education, whether or not their parents go to work. However, too few places exist and many of those that do are ill used. Today's children are tomorrows politicians, doctors, lawyers and bricklayers and should be given every chance to make the most of these formative years. Schemes such as community day nurseries seem to be a solution. The whole community, including childminders, can be involved and made to feel useful. Work and company can be provided for the young, and elderly, the lonely and the unemployed; surely, if this is achieved on a nation-wide basis then greater harmony and understanding of our fellow beings can only follow. As someone once said: if you get the child right, you get the world right.



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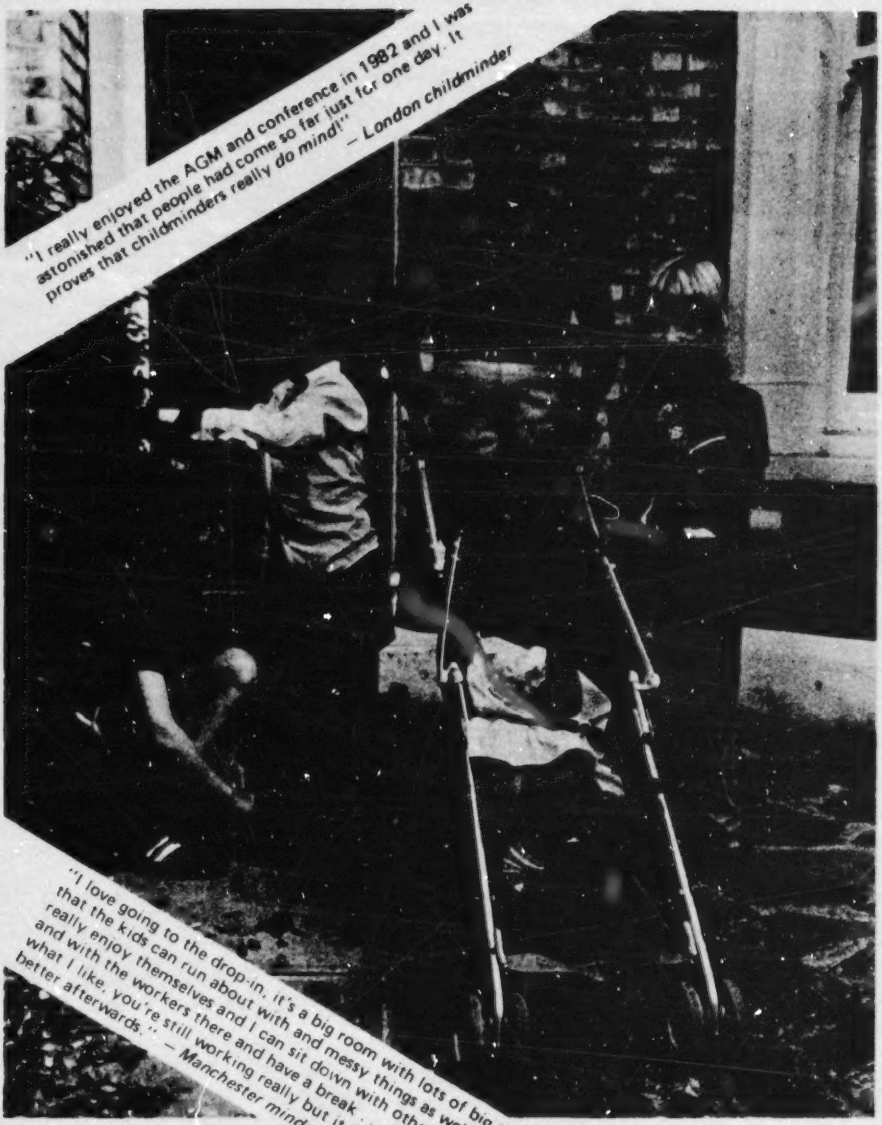

"I really enjoyed the AGM and conference in 1982 and I was astonished that people had come so far just for one day. It proves that childminders really *do mind!*"
— *London childminder*

"I love going to the drop-in, it's a big room with lots of big toys that the kids can run about with and messy things as well. They really enjoy themselves and I can sit down with other minders and with the workers there and have a break . . . I suppose that's what I like, you're still working really but it is a break and I feel better afterwards." — *Manchester minder.*

Photo: Gina Glover/Photo Co-op

## CHILDMINDERS' CHECKLIST

This handbook has covered a lot of questions which you or your family might want to ask about childminding. Now, here's a checklist of things to do before you start minding (and to return to later). All have been mentioned in the handbook.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Contact your Social Services Department for:** | registration<br>support facilities<br>training courses<br>a contact in case of problems |
| **Talk to your family about the job.**<br>**Talk to the parents of all new children about:** | the child<br>payments<br>contract form<br>essential information<br>diet |
| **Settling children in:** | Take time for this, ask parents to visit as often as possible before the child starts. Can you visit them at home too? |
| **Your free milk** | Have you applied yet? Ask Social Services for the forms. |
| **Money matters** | Have you worked out what to do about tax, national insurance or social security benefits? Check with Social Services on how much minders charge in your area. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **NCMA** | Have you joined yet? Contact NCMA in Bromley for information about childminders groups near you. |
| **Insurance** | Don't take a child until you're insured. Contact NCMA for details. |
| **First Aid** | Do you have all essential health information on all your children? Have you put together your first aid box yet? |
| **Safety** | Social Services will check your home for safety, but you should do so too and ask if they can loan you big items such as fire guards and stair gates. |
| **Can you get out?** | It's important to be able to take the children out. Do you have access to a double push chair? You might be able to borrow one from Social Services. |
| **Play** | Have you worked out what to do with the children? You should have adequate supplies of toys before you start and some plans for 'messy' play on certain days. |
| **Food** | Work out a series of cheap and nutritious menus for the week, then you won't have to nip out for something expensive at the last minute or dish up baked beans five days in a row. |

The following pages have been left blank for your notes, local names and addresses, etc.

**Spot the deliberate mistake**

1. This fire is far too big *and* it has no guard. There should be a large, box-type guard which encloses the area of the grate and is fastened securely to the wall on both sides.
2. What are the children doing? There are no toys for them to play with, certainly nothing which is appropriate to their ages. Consequently the school-age boys are fighting, endangering both themselves and the little ones, and the older girl is amusing herself with matches. Similarly, the toddler has found herself some heavy brass fire tools to play with.
3. The stand for the fire tools has been left in easy reach of the children as has the poker!
4. What about the coal scuttle? We know of a child who was seriously hurt by falling onto the unprotected sharp edge of one just like this.
5. Now for the hazards above the fire: the kettle is very unstable on that small shelf and the baby could easily pull it off. It's safest to leave kettles in the kitchen.
6. The toys have been carelessly and temptingly left on the mantlepiece where the children have to reach over the fire to get them.
7. Our minders' cup of coffee has been left there too: dangerous again for children who can't quite reach properly.
8. The aspirin bottle has also been left on the mantlepiece: never leave medicine within reach of children.
9. Our minder should get a new flex for the kettle, this one is dangerously worn and frayed.
10. There have been too many combustible objects left within easy reach of the fire: the matches, the fire-lighters and a newspaper. Matches should be kept well out of the reach of small children; this older girl should have been taught to respect them as tools, not to use them as playthings.
11. The baby has a big china mug; far too large and difficult for him to handle successfully and also dangerous if he should throw it around.
12. The one electric socket has been fitted with an adapter so that it can take three plugs: this can easily lead to overloading and the possibility of a fire.
13. There are also too many trailing flexes which can tempt a child towards the electric socket and can also trip them up (they can trip the minder up too and she might be carrying a baby!)
14. This is the trick one. There's no minder in sight. Of course you have to leave the children sometimes, but obviously this is not the time or the place to have left these little ones alone.



Front cover photo by Jan Chippe